

25
A
S E R M O N

Occasion'd by the

D E A T H

Of the REVEREND

Mr. JOHN SLADEN,

W H O

Departed this Life *Octob.* 19, 1733.

T H E

Substance whereof was preached to the
Church of which he was PASTOR,
October 28.

And published at their REQUEST.

By THOMAS RIDGLEY, D. D.

L O N D O N:

Printed for AARON WARD *at the King's Arms in Little*
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W. Musgrave.

Occasionally the

DEATH

Of the Reverend

Mt. John St. Andrew



Substance whereof was preached to the
Church of which he was Pastor
October 25.

And published in this REQUEST.

By Thomas Ridgely, B. D.

LONDON:

Printed by George Wain of the Kings Arms in the
Street; John Gower at the Rose and Crown; and
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(This is the first)

I TIM. I. 15.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

AS every providence that we are exercised with contains a visible display of the divine perfections, so it has a voice, which we are to attend to, while we adore and bow down before him, whose counsels are unsearchable, and his will not to be controul'd. But, when he thinks fit to speak in a way that is in an uncommon degree awful and terrible; when he takes away some that have been useful and desirable in life, by a sudden stroke, and thereby brings a dark cloud over families, who a little before thought themselves happy; and when he deprives churches of those pastors that were dear to, and deservedly valued by them, for their works sake, where-

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by they are left as sheep having no shepherd; this is a very afflictive circumstance; which you cannot but be sensible of to whom I am more immediately to address my self.

The words that I have read to you are an *epitome* of the gospel, the theme that ministers are chiefly to recommend, as the greatest spring of comfort to believers both in life and death; and therefore it was with very good reason that I was desir'd by your late pastor to insist on them; that while we are expressing the last publick testimony of respect to his memory, you may be induc'd to improve the subject-matter thereof to your spiritual advantage. It appears, by a writing which he left behind him, that about two years since he had some apprehensions of the uncertainty of this present life, and it may be had some impressions on his spirit, that he should not continue long in this world, though at the same time, in all appearance, his strength was firm, his constitution unbroken, and he had as great a prospect of living many years, according to the course of nature, as any can be supposed to have: Nevertheless, he gave particular orders concerning his funeral, and that the words I have read to you should be insisted on, when his service in this place and in the world should be at an end; and he gave a particular intimation, that all his hope of salvation was founded on them, which he desir'd should be engrav'd even on his tomb-stone; and

and they are certainly well adapted, when improv'd and applied by faith, to support and comfort a soul in the foreviews of his approaching dissolution. The apostle, indeed, when he wrote them to *Timothy*, was not in the immediate prospect of death, as he was when he directed his *second epistle* to him, in which he tells him, that he was *ready to be offer'd, and the time of his departure was at hand*^a; for now he gives him to understand, in the *third chapter* of this epistle, that he *hoped to come unto him shortly*, viz. to *Ephesus*, where he had left him^b, and therefore he expected that he should have liberty, and renewed opportunities, to pursue the great work of preaching the gospel, that he had before been successfully engaged in, and accordingly he applies these words to himself, as matter of encouragement to him in the whole course of his ministry. The same doctrines that are a support to believers in death, will afford the greatest relief to them in every station of life; but more especially to ministers, in the difficult work to which they are called.

In the foregoing *verses* the apostle speaks concerning our Saviour's *putting him into the ministry*, as *counting him faithful*, whom he had made so, and *enabling him* to fulfil it, notwithstanding his unworthiness of this honour and privilege, inasmuch as he had

^a Chap. iv. 6.

^b Chap. iii. 14. compar'd with i. 3.

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been a *blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious*. He often calls to mind his former conversation, as desirous not to conceal or extenuate the crimes he once committed, that he might take occasion to humble himself in the sight of God, and to advance that grace by which, when converted, he was what he was. Here he speaks of himself as a persecutor, and injurious to the saints; but elsewhere ^c, when standing before *Agrippa*, he confesses in the most publick manner, that he *shut up many of them in prison; and when they were put to death he gave his voice against them; and punish'd them oft in every synagogue*. And as he here styles himself a blasphemer, he there adds, that he *compell'd others to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them, persecuted them unto strange cities*. And as if this was not sufficient to express the sense he had of his former vileness, he styles himself, in my text, *the chief of sinners*: “ He says not, I was, “ but I am, as one observes ^d; because, “ when sin is pardoned, we ought to have “ the prospect of it still before us, to keep “ us humble, and sensible of the grace of “ God to us.” And therefore it is, as tho’ he should say, no one ever obtain’d mercy, that was more unworthy of it than my self, when God was pleas’d to forgive, and call me by his grace. And then he takes occa-

^c Acts xxvi. 10, 11.

^d *vid.* Whitby in loc.

tion to set forth the glory of his great deliverer, and to extol the method of salvation revealed in the gospel, as an encouragement to those who apprehend themselves in like circumstances, that so none may sink into despair, since *Christ Jesus came into the world to save the chief of sinners.*

In speaking to these words we shall, by divine assistance, observe this method,

I. We shall consider the apostle's humble and penitent confession of sin.

II. The relief that such an one hath, under his present distress, from the consideration of that salvation which is discovered in the gospel.

III. We have an account of the person by whom this salvation is brought about; and, by what means he saves his people.

IV. We shall consider the intimation that is given of this salvation, not only as it is an undoubted truth, but the result of the faithfulness of God, upon which account it is called a faithful saying. And,

V. The improvement a believer ought to make of it, as it is said to be worthy of all acceptation.

I. Here is a humble and penitent confession made by this great apostle, I am the chief of sinners. And this may be considered

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der'd as applicable to all Believers; and accordingly we may observe from thence, that the best of God's saints have reason to be humble and penitent, under a sense of their present or former sins; and it may be, they may in some respects see reason to conclude themselves worthy to be reckon'd among the chief of sinners.

Here we may observe,

1. That as all are guilty of sin, all ought to confess and repent of it, believers as well as others. This I can't but mention, because some, without the least ground or warrant from scripture, and in direct opposition to the many instances to the contrary, which we find therein, have advanc'd this unsavory notion, That they who are in a justified state ought not to confess, no more than to pray for the pardon of sin; and to support this assertion they say, that to confess sin is to suppose our selves guilty, which is in effect to conclude, that we are not in a justified state. So that since a person, whose sins are pardon'd, ought not to plead guilty, therefore he ought not to confess sin; but certainly the humble and penitent acknowledgment of their offences, which the saints of God are frequently represented as making before him, can't but confute this unscriptural method of reasoning, from the privilege that is conferr'd on a justified Person. It is an undoubted truth, that *there is no man on earth, how just soever he may be in other respects,*
that

that doth good and sinneth not? Corrupt nature may be subdued, as it is in those who are converted; but, yet it is not wholly extinguished, while we are in this imperfect state.

It may be farther observed, that inasmuch as sin is a violation of the divine law, every one, who is a sinner, deserves to have the condemning sentence thereof executed upon him, though his guilt may be removed, supposing him to be in a justified state; therefore he ought, in this respect, to plead guilty, or to say with the Psalmist^f, *If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?* This is to be confessed, and consequently *every mouth must be stopped, and all the world must become,* and accordingly plead, *guilty before God*^g. A justified person, indeed, has ground of hope, that God will not punish him as a sin-revenging judge, inasmuch as he has obtained forgiveness through the blood of Christ: But it does not necessarily follow, that this privilege is denied when we confess our guilt before him, and acknowledge, that if he should deal with us according to our own unworthiness, we should be undone and lost for ever. The grace of God in Christ don't extenuate sin, so as to take away the intrinsic demerit thereof, or make that to be no sin, which is contrary to the divine law;

^g Eccles. vii. 20.

^f Psalm cxxx. 3.

^g Rom. iii. 19.

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therefore it is not to be suppos'd, that we don't contract guilt thereby : It is one thing for a person to render himself guilty, by a violation of the law of God, and another thing for God to charge guilt on his person, and insist on his making satisfaction for crimes committed : This he will not do in those who are justified, since he has received satisfaction at the hands of their surety ; but if he should enter into judgment with them, or deal with them according to the demerit of their actions, the guilt which they contract would be charg'd upon them, and as the consequence thereof, they would be forever banish'd from his comfortable presence.

This is an undoubted truth, and therefore to be acknowledg'd, in which respect sin, as to what concerns the guilt thereof, is to be confessed by them : Thus *David*, though he considers himself as having obtained forgiveness, yet he says ^h, *I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid : I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord.* And as we are thus to plead guilty, so we are to own, that God is righteous in all the dispensations of his providence, when his hand is heavy, and his dread falls upon us. And when at any time we are ready to question, whether our iniquities are forgiven, or no, in this

^h Psalm xxxiii. 5.

case we must say with *Ezra*¹, *Thou, our God, hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve.* And if, on the other hand, we hope better things concerning our selves, as having a comfortable sense of our interest in Christ's righteousness, whereby the guilt of sin is taken away; yet we ought to fear and tremble, lest we should be so far left to our selves, that, by contracting fresh guilt, we should be exposed to God's just displeasure, who may *forgive the iniquity* of his people, as the Psalmist speaks^k, and yet, as to what concerns the external dispensations of his providence, *take vengeance of their inventions.*

Moreover, we are to confess sin, as that which is defiling and enslaving, whereby our hearts and affections are, or at least have been, alienated from the life of God, serving divers lusts and pleasures; frequently neglecting the duties which we were oblig'd to perform; and our hearts have been sometimes harden'd in sin, being call'd *transgressors from the womb*¹. Thus we are to condemn and abhor our selves, and fall down before the footstool of the throne of grace, with shame and confusion of face, and the exercise of unfeign'd repentance for those sins which we have reason to charge our selves with. Thus concerning the Duty incumbent on all to confess sin.

¹ Chap. ix. 13.

^k Psalm xcix. 8.

¹ Isa. xlviii. 8.

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2. We are to enquire, Whether a Believer is oblig'd to acknowledge himself to be the *chief of sinners*? Or, whether the apostle had any reference, when he styles himself so, to his present condition, as in a converted and justified state? For the understanding of this let it be consider'd,

(1.) That our confession is to be agreeable to the nature of things, otherwise it is not just or warrantable; therefore it is not to be supposed, that a believer, according to his present frame and condition, who maintains a constant hatred of all sin, and endeavours to avoid it, is to charge himself with those enormous crimes, which many unregenerate persons are guilty of, in all their circumstances. Nor is he to consider sin as reigning in, or having dominion over him, for that is altogether inconsistent with his being in a converted state, which he is supposed to be, inasmuch as he is a believer. He is not to say, I am now as great a sinner as formerly I was, when running in all excess of riot; for that would be virtually to deny those experiences that he has had of the rich, free, and sovereign grace of God, that has effectually call'd and sanctified him.

As he is regenerate, and accordingly has a principle of spiritual life and grace implanted in him, he is not, in his confessing sin, to disown this privilege, nor ought he to disregard the experiences he has had of restraining

straining grace, whereby a multitude of sins have been prevented; and as there is something in his soul that makes a stand against the power of indwelling corruption, whereby he maintains a constant warfare and opposition thereunto, he is not to consider himself as led captive by *Satan* at his will, which would be to set aside the grace of God that has brought him hitherto; nor is he to look upon sin as unpardoned, or to confess it as one that is destitute of all hope that he has obtained forgiveness through the blood of Christ, since he is supposed to be in a justified state.

(2.) Let it be farther consider'd, that nevertheless, when a believer compares himself with others, he is not to do it in a vain-glorious way, as one who over-values himself, and casts contempt on them: He must not say with the *Pharisee*, *God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men^m*. We are to be sensible, that if God should leave us to our selves we should be as bad as the worst of men on earth, though we hope and trust that he will never fail us, nor forsake us. We have in our corrupt nature the seeds of all sin, and therefore have reason to reckon our selves, by nature, children of wrath, vile as hell; and if we are in any respects better than others, it is owing to the grace of God: Therefore, though God

^m Luke xviii. 11.

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will not charge us with the guilt of those sins that we should have committed, had we not been prevented with the blessings of his goodness; yet this affords matter for self-abasement in his sight, who makes us to differ from others, as those who have nothing but what we have received from him. This leads us to consider,

II. The relief that one who confesses himself to be the chief of sinners may have, from the consideration of that salvation which is discover'd in the gospel. We have hitherto consider'd a person as burdened with a sense of guilt, and fill'd with shame and self-abhorrence, by reason of the pollution and defilement of sin, taking a view of his actions as contrary to the law of God, and seeing himself worthy to be loathed by him, whereby he is render'd very uneasy; and, if he has any concern about his future welfare, he will enquire, whether there be any redress for him under his present grievance? In answer hereunto there is a discovery of salvation in the gospel, viz. that God has a design to deliver his people from the guilt and dominion of sin, and thereby prevent their destruction. This is a favour that takes its rise from God alone. Man might see himself plung'd into depths of misery by reason of sin, but he could not find out any expedient whereby he might attain salvation, and be re-instated in the
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favour of God, which he had forfeited and lost by his apostacy from him. This is the great design of the publication of the gospel, which proclaims the glad tidings of salvation to lost sinners, and liberty to those that are in a state of servitude to sin and Satan.

In order to our understanding what is intended hereby, we must consider salvation as a blessing adapted to the circumstances of those who are humbling themselves before God, and confessing themselves to be the chief of sinners, as was before observ'd. Does sin bring with it a sense of guilt, whereby a person apprehends himself bound over to suffer the wrath of God as the consequence thereof? Salvation is that whereby he is delivered from the wrath to come, and not only so, but interested in the favour of God, becomes the object of his love, is made partaker of the blessings of the covenant of grace, and has a right and title to eternal life. And inasmuch as guilt, which is an obligation to suffer punishment, has a tendency to excite that fear and dread of God as a judge, whereby the soul flees from him as an enemy; salvation is that which frees him from his slavish fear, as being enabled to behold the great God as his friend and reconciled Father; which tends to establish his comforts, and gives him liberty of access to a throne of grace.

Moreover, as sin vitiates the soul, defiles the conscience, and by being persisted in
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renders us more and more averse to God and holiness; salvation includes in it a change in all the powers and faculties of the soul, an habitual inclination to what is good, and a desire to approve our selves to God as his faithful subjects in the whole course of our Conversation, in which we are said to walk with him. This is stiled a being *saved and called with an* internal, effectual, and *holy calling*ⁿ, which is begun in regeneration, and carried on in sanctification, in which we are enabled, in a progressive way, to die unto sin and live unto righteousness; to love and chuse that which God approves of, and hate every false way, and to maintain a daily conflict with the remainders of corruption in the heart, till all the seeds and habits thereof are utterly rooted out, and the work brought to perfection, and this attended with compleat blessedness in a better world. Which leads us to consider,

III. The person by whom, and the means whereby, this salvation was brought about, as it is said in our text, that *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*. Salvation is not only a work of the highest importance, as that in which the honour of God, and the eternal welfare of his people is concerned, but it was attended with those difficulties that all the angels in heaven were

ⁿ 2 Tim. i. 9.

not equal to it, much less could the fallen creature bring it about himself. There must be an atonement made for sin, an infinite price given, such as might satisfy the demands of justice, so that God might appear to be just, and yet justify the guilty sinner; when this is done, and redemption is purchased, it must be applied, Satan vanquished, and the power of sin subdued, and they who are interested therein, are to be made a willing people, the heart of stone broken, all the powers and faculties of the soul entirely subjected to the will of God, and the work carried on in the heart, against all the opposition that it meets with from the corruption of nature, till 'tis brought to perfection.

This must therefore be committed to the management of a divine person, thoroughly furnished with every thing that was necessary to his performing it successfully, and with the greatest advantage. Such an one was our Lord Jesus Christ. Which leads us to speak something concerning the person to whom this work was committed, and the method taken by him to save sinners.

I. We have in our Text the person described, to wit, Christ Jesus, who sustained the character, and performed the work of a mediator, who was the Son of God incarnate, or the second person in the Godhead assuming the human nature, and consequently he is able to save to the uttermost, having

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a nature in all things like unto us, sin only excepted. He was capable of yielding obedience to the law of God, which we had broken, and suffering the punishment of sin we had deserved; that hereby the truth of the threatening, in which death was rendered the wages of sin, might be illustrated, so that, as by man sin and death, with all the destructive consequences thereof, entered into the world, by man this great deliverance might be procured, and death swallowed up in victory.

Moreover, as he was a divine person, there was an infinite dignity, and merit reflected on his obedience and sufferings, on which account the price he paid was deemed sufficient, and as the consequence hereof, God could not but be well pleased in him; and his people have the highest assurance, that it was impossible the work should miscarry in his hands, so that this salvation is render'd more glorious, from the consideration of the author of it. Which leads us to consider,

2. The means whereby he brought it about; thus 'tis said in our text, *That he came into the world to save sinners.* This indeed was the first step he took with a view to our redemption, which includes in it his incarnation; and it was necessary in order to his making reconciliation for the sins of his people. Nevertheless, it was not barely his coming into the world; but all that he did
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and suffered while he was in it, that was the foundation of our justification. The apostle intimates as much when speaking of it, he says that *he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross* °; so that as our surety, he performed all that the law and justice of God demanded of us, which was necessary in order to his making satisfaction for sin, redeeming us from the curse, and condemning sentence of the law, and procuring for us a right to the heavenly blessedness. In this he had to do more especially with God, in our behalf, whereby he *put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*; and this work was finished when he rose again from the dead, whereby he *was declared to be the Son of God with power*, was justified in the Spirit, and had an ample testimony that nothing farther was demanded as a price of our redemption.

Hence the salvation of his people took its first rise; but yet there was something more that remained to be done by him in the application of redemption, and in order thereto he ascended into heaven, triumphing over death and hell, and there makes intercession for those whom he had redeemed; and by his Spirit, sent for that purpose, as the consequence hereof, he works all that grace in their souls, whereby they are made partakers of that branch of salvation, which consists in an

° Phil. ii. 8.

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internal work on their hearts, whereby they are quickened, sanctified, and comforted, made meet for, and afterwards received to glory. In all these respects our Lord Jesus answered the end for which he came into the world, namely, that he might save sinners. Which leads us to consider,

IV. The intimation given hereof, as a *faithful saying*; that is, an undoubted truth, in which the faithfulness, as well as the veracity of God, is eminently glorified. Christ's coming into the world to save sinners is what may be depended on, as a matter of the greatest certainty, and therefore the account thereof contained in the gospel may well be stiled a faithful report. And as this was the result of an eternal covenant between the Father and the Son, and an accomplishment of the promises contained therein, which were the foundation of the hope of those who lived in all foregoing ages, it was a demonstration of the faithfulness of God.

I. It is a doctrine founded on the strongest evidence, so that there is no room to doubt or question the truth thereof. And indeed, it was necessary that it should be thus certain, otherwise the christian religion would be little more than an amusement or vain speculation; our faith would be un-
hing'd, and we should have no foundation whereon to set our feet: To be a sceptick

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as to this matter would be unspeakably dangerous and uncomfortable.

Now, that this may appear to all who pay a just deference to divine revelation, from whence this doctrine takes its rise, it may be observed, that God gave his People ground to expect, that Christ Jesus should come into the world, in all foregoing ages, so that 'tis not to be consider'd as an unforeseen event, as though no notices had been given of it to the church before. Our first parents had an intimation of it immediately after their apostacy from God, which was, as it were, a new life, and foundation of hope and comfort to them. The prediction, indeed, how much soever it might be explained to them by some other methods which we have no reason to doubt of, is laid down in scripture in the most general terms^p, that *the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent*; without giving any account when this should be done, or from what particular branch of their descendants, this victorious person, who was to bring about their salvation, was to arise, as a blessing to their miserable race; yet there was a beam of light that shined forth in this first promise, which raised the expectation, and was the foundation of the faith of fallen man.

Afterwards this promise was renewed,

^p Gen. iii. 15.

and

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and given to the church, in more full and express terms. *Abraham* had an intimation, that one should descend from him, in whom *all the nations of the earth should be blessed*^q, which was a more solid foundation of comfort and joy to him, than the numerous seed that was promised him at the same time; upon which account he is represented as *rejoycing to see Christ's day, he saw it and was glad*^r; though it is more than probable, that the age of the world in which he should be born was not revealed to him.

After this we have a more particular account concerning our Saviour, in the writings of the prophets, to whom they are all said to give witness^t. And some of them, especially the prophet *Isaiab*, are so particular, as though they designed to write an history, rather than a prophecy of his life and times: Some of them give a character of his person as God-man, Mediator; the particular family from whence he should descend; yea, the place where he should be born, and the age of the world in which he should come to *finish transgressions, make an end of sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness*. This was intimated by the prophet *Daniel*, who described him under the character of the *Messiah*^t. We have also several predictions relating to the offices that he

^q Gen. xxii. 18.

^r John viii. 56.

^t Acts x. 43.

^t Dan. ix. 24——26.

should

should execute, the different states and conditions in which he should be, the sufferings that he should endure, and the triumphs and glory that should follow.

'Tis not therefore to be wonder'd at, that the *Jews* universally, and with a kind of impatience expected his coming, how much soever they were afterwards offended in him, because he did not appear with that external pomp and grandeur which was agreeable to the *Idea* they had of a secular dominion, which they vainly fancied he should then erect: Their language was to this purpose; why are his chariot wheels so long a coming, *until the day break, and the shadows flee away, make hast my beloved, and be like a roe, or a young hart, upon the mountains*^u. And it is plain, that they understood those predictions that related to the time of his appearing, as what should be fulfilled in the age in which he was born, and therefore, if any pretended to the character of the *Messiah*, especially if they were disposed to make tumults and insurrections, as some did, there were multitudes ready to adhere to them, as the *Jewish* historian observes^x, though it were to their own ruin. And indeed, they were so full of this matter, that they could not conceal it from the Heathen, with whom they conversed, which gave occasion to them

^u Cant. iii. 17. compar'd with Chap. viii. 14.

^x See Jos. Ant. Lib. xviii. cap. 1. Lib. xx. cap. 2. & de Bel. Jud. Lib. II. cap. 6:

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to mention it as what they had received by tradition from the *Jews*, and was commonly reported among them, that a great King was to appear at that time, who should make vast changes in the world, which raised their jealousy, as fearing that something might come to pass which would endanger the ruin of the *Roman* empire^v. Whereas indeed, our Saviour did not design to erect a kingdom that was of this world, but such as was of a spiritual nature, and bring the Heathen to embrace that faith, which was to be publickly proclaimed, and established in the gospel-dispensation, and not to destroy them by force of arms, which he did not give the least encouragement to his followers to do.

Thus Christ's coming into the world to save sinners was expected, pursuant to what was predicted concerning it; which, if we compare with the gospel-history, we shall find, that what is therein recorded is exactly agreeable thereunto; and the truth thereof is established by the testimony of those who were eye-witnesses to what they reported, having had the honour of an intimate conversation with our Saviour; and they were men of an unspotted character, therefore what they imparted to the world cannot reasonably be denied or disbelieved by any.

Moreover the testimony that was given to

^v Vid. Suet. in Vespas. & Tacit. Histor. Lib. V.

Christ's mission was divine, inasmuch as every miracle that was wrought was of that kind, and therefore sufficient to excite a divine faith; and the witness of the apostles, that such miracles were wrought, and that what is related in the Gospels concerning our Saviour was true, was as good an evidence as we could expect or desire. The persons who attested these things, and were sent to publish the gospel to the world, were chosen by him to be witnesses of his resurrection from the dead, on which all the other branches of the christian religion depend. These were men who had no sinister ends in view, nor indeed was it possible for them to promote their secular interest thereby: On the other hand, they were given to expect, when first called to this service, to be hated of all men for his name's sake; and to do this not only at their peril, but at the loss of their very lives. And as this was sufficient to establish their sincerity and faithfulness in the report they gave, so they were not destitute of a divine testimony by miracles, added to their own, which was a means, attended with the peculiar blessing of the Spirit of God, to propagate the gospel through the world, and bring many to the obedience of faith.

2. There is another thing contained in this expression, when the apostle calls it a *faithful saying*, namely, that Christ's coming into the world to save sinners, was the result

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of the divine faithfulness, inasmuch as this was done pursuant to an eternal covenant, that passed between the Father and the Son, relating to this matter. There is nothing done in the whole method of providence and grace, but what was pre-concerted, and accordingly was the result of God's eternal purpose: And as the Father and the Son had each of them a distinct concern in the work of our redemption, they had each a distinct consideration in the eternal plan that was laid in order to its being brought about. Thus our Saviour *was*, as the apostle expresses it, *fore-ordin'd before the foundation of the world*²; call'd to engage in the office of a mediator; the whole work of the redemption of the elect committed to his management; promises given him for his encouragement herein, of which some related to his having an human nature, curiously fram'd and prepar'd by the Father, and furnish'd by the Holy Ghost, with all those gifts and graces that were necessary to his engaging in this work; and there were other promises relating to his being carried successfully through it, *viz.* that after the *suffering of death* he should be *crowned with glory and honour*; and then, have the application of redemption committed to him, that so it might be truly said of him, that he perform'd the work, and has a right to bear the glory thereof.

2 I Pet. i. 20.

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On the other hand, our Saviour, being called to perform this work, gave his full consent thereunto, express'd in those words^a, *Lo, I come to do thy will*; I am content that thou shouldst bore mine ear; I am willing to be thy servant, to perform this important work; *I delight to do thy will, O God*. The work lay very near his heart, inasmuch as it would bring the highest revenue of glory to the divine name. And indeed, it was absolutely necessary, not only that he should be called to it, but that he should comply with this call. Had he not been call'd to it, God the Father could not have accepted of any thing that might have been done by him, as a price of redemption, how valuable soever it might be in it self: And his compliance is equally necessary, inasmuch as he was to be substituted in the room of sinners, be charg'd with their guilt, and bear the punishment that was due to them, though he was in all other respects guiltless. Now justice cannot admit of any one's bearing that guilt which was contracted by others, and suffering the punishment that was due to them, without his own consent. This he freely gave, and promis'd to fulfil the work that was committed to him; therefore, as his being sent into the world to save sinners, was a display of the faithfulness of God the Father; his doing this with his own consent,

^a Psalm xl. 5.

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pursuant to what he had stipulated in this eternal covenant, was an instance of the glory of his own faithfulness, which divine perfection belonging equally to him with the Father, was eminently glorified also in every thing that he did and suffered in order to the salvation of his people; and therefore we may well call this doctrine, relating to his coming into the world to save sinners, a *faithful saying*. Which leads us to consider,

V. The acceptableness thereof; and how it ought to be apply'd to our selves, and improv'd by us for our support and comfort. It is not enough for us to be convinc'd, that there was such a person as our Lord Jesus Christ, who first dwelt among us, and then, when he had finish'd the work he came into the world about, exchang'd it for a better; but we must endeavour to find our own account in it, and make out our particular interest in that salvation, the procuring whereof was the great design of his coming into the world; and accordingly Christ and his benefits are to be embraced and received by faith.

Salvation cannot but be reckon'd a desirable blessing, and if so, then the glad tidings thereof cannot but be acceptable; and Christ, who was the author of it worthy of our highest esteem. When the work of our redemption was finished, there was a commi-
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sion given to publish it to the world. Christ is represented in the preaching of the gospel as the object of our supreme love, the desire of all nations, and consequently the object of faith, and sinners are call'd to come to him, that they may have life, and to induce them hereunto, he is set forth in the excellency of his person, as the only begotten of the Father, *full of grace and truth*; as having all the perfections of the divine nature, and therefore being all-sufficient, able not only to make us happy, but to *do exceeding abundantly above what we can either ask or think.*

He is also represented as a merciful and faithful high-priest, who can have compassion on those who are miserable, and is willing to pass by all the injuries they have offer'd to him, *whose thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways.* Are they burdened with a sense of guilt, and afraid to come into the presence of an absolute God? Do they tremble at his wrath, which is as a *consuming Fire*? Are they in the utmost perplexity and distress, as knowing no way to escape it, or to obtain that peace which may render them comfortable and happy? These are call'd to come to him, in hope of obtaining salvation from him. He is represented as having a sufficiency of merit to make atonement for the greatest sins; a righteousness, in which all who are interested are accepted in the sight of God; he presents

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presents to their view all the graces and comforts of his Spirit, which he has to bestow, inasmuch as he has all the promises of the covenant of grace in his hand, which he will certainly make good; and therefore we may depend upon it, that as he will not reject those that come to him by faith, so they shall be made partakers of those benefits which he came into the world to procure, which will render them not only safe, but happy in the midst of all the dangers and difficulties which they are expos'd to in this world.

He promises to bestow on them all those distinguishing marks of favour which belong to them whom he delights to honour; he secures to them, that they shall obtain by his grace a complete victory over all their spiritual enemies; and that he will confer upon them that crown of righteousness which is reserved for his saints in a better world.

One would think, that this kind and gracious overture should be embrac'd with the greatest readiness; that the gospel should make its own way into the hearts and affections of those to whom it is preach'd: But, alas! it is far otherwise, for we must consider many of those to whom this salvation is discovered, as resolutely bent to go on in their course of rebellion against God. Some are ready to think, that they may attain salvation another way; they entertain a vain dream,
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of obtaining happiness without having any thing to do with Christ, or that they have a sufficiency in themselves to atone for their sins, and procure acceptance in the sight of God; they trust in a refuge of lies, and lean on a broken reed; weary themselves in the greatness of their way, seeking life and salvation where it is not to be found.

It is an hard matter for the sinner to be persuaded, that salvation by Christ alone is a doctrine worthy of all acceptation; especially to persuade him so to believe it as practically to improve it for his own advantage, and have recourse to Christ as waiting for salvation in his own way. But when the report of the gospel is attended with the revelation of the arm of God, a principle of spiritual life and grace implanted in the heart, and the stubborn will of man brought into subjection to Christ; the heart of stone taken away, and an heart of flesh given; when all things are created anew in the soul, the eyes of his understanding enlightened, whereby he is enabled to see these great truths in their own beauty and glory, and the opposition that there was in his heart to them removed; then salvation by Christ will appear to be the most acceptable message that can be proclaim'd; then he is internally dispos'd to comply with the gospel-call, by the energy and power of the Holy Ghost, being filled with admiring apprehensions of that grace that is contain'd therein,

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in, and the highest affection to him, who is the author of it. Then the language of the soul is, " Lord, I bow down before thy
" sceptre, though I have long stood it out
" against thee; thou hast at length over-
" come me by thy grace, who confess my
" self to be so vile that I am ashamed to lift
" up mine eyes to heaven."

This is true repentance, proceeding from a renewed nature. He calls to mind his former conversation, and is astonished, ashamed, and even confounded, that he should run so great lengths in rebellion against such a Saviour; how he was like the swift dromedary traversing her ways; he was hardly ever inclined, before this, to confess himself *the chief of sinners*, but now he has a full conviction thereof. 'Tis matter of amazement to him, that he was not long before this struck down to hell with a thunderbolt, and he admires and adores the riches of divine grace; that Christ should condescend to look upon such a wretch as he was.

Thus he is truly humbled, and casts himself at the foot of Jesus, and by faith receiving what he is pleased to impart, he makes an entire surrender of himself to him, and humbly hopes and trusts that he shall be prevented by him, from turning back into the paths of the destroyer. He is sensible that he has a corrupt nature that is daily prone to betray and lead him aside from
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God; therefore he desires Christ's protection, begging to be delivered from all his spiritual enemies, but more especially from that which is the most subtle and dangerous, namely, himself; and that he may be entirely devoted to Christ, and have communion with him, that so the good work which is begun in him may be carried on, and he made partaker of the consolations of the Holy Ghost, whereby he may be enabled more and more to taste the sweetness of the love of Christ shed abroad in his heart, and may have the first fruits of salvation here; the earnest and pledge of that happiness to which Christ will bring all his saints, hereafter.

From what has been observ'd, under the foregoing *Heads*, several things may be inferr'd,

1. That, since the best of God's saints have sometimes seen reason to confess themselves, especially as to what respects their conversation while in a state of unregeneracy, to have been *the chief of sinners*, we may conclude, that they who are altogether destitute of a sense of sin have ground to fear, that they are strangers to the grace of God; for this has the greatest tendency to humble and bring us to repentance: But this can't be where there is no sense of sin; such can't have recourse to Christ for forgiveness, as he says, *the whole need not the physician; but*

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they that are sick : or, that he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.
As, all reproofs will be disregarded by those who persist in their own vindication, and say with Ephraim, in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin^e; so the most pressing motives to induce them to seek salvation in Christ will be to no purpose. It is in vain to tell them, that Christ came into the world to save sinners, and thereby to deliver them from the guilt that they are under, so long as they harden themselves against conviction, and refuse to acknowledge that they are guilty before God:

2. Though a believer has obtained forgiveness from God of all the sins which he has formerly committed; yet this is not inconsistent with his being humbled for, and often calling them to mind. Some who have had a comfortable hope that they are in a justified state, have, notwithstanding, express'd themselves to this purpose; though God has graciously forgiven me I cannot forgive my self, that is, I can't think on my past conduct, without regret and shame; and it is agreeable to what the prophet says^d, *That thou mayst remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee, for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord*

^a Mat. ix. 12, 13.

^c Hosea xii. 8.

^d Ezek. xvi. 63.

God. And *Job* calls to mind the sins of his youth, and concludes, that *God was writing bitter things against him for them*; and elsewhere, *abhors himself, and repents in dust and ashes*, notwithstanding all the experiences he had had of the grace of God in subduing and pardoning them^f. A believer looks forward with hope, when he considers the blessings that are reserved for him, and backward with sorrow and self-abasement, whereby he retains a constant sense of his own unworthiness. He comforts himself in Christ, while he is greatly afflicted with the remembrance of what he has done against him, and the many instances of contempt that he has cast on the gospel, which at present he apprehends to be the spring of all his support and encouragement.

3. We are not to expect to find relief under a sense of the guilt of sin, by concealing or extenuating it, or to take encouragement, that there are others whose crimes are more notorious than ours, but by having recourse to that salvation that is in Christ. We are to charge our selves with guilt, and then seek to be discharged from it by that atonement he has made. When we confess sin we are not to say, Lord, I am not so great a sinner as many others in the world, therefore I hope, that thou wilt deal well with me; or, I have been diligent in the perform-

^g Job xiii. 26.

^f Chap. xlii. 6.

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ance of many moral duties, and for this reason, I trust that thou wilt overlook the unavoidable infirmities and failures of life, that I might accuse my self of; this is to seek righteousness and salvation in our selves rather than in Christ. The apostle *Paul* could say, that before his conversion he was with respect to *the righteousness which is in the law blameless*, in the eye of the world^s, yet when he speaks of Christ as coming to save sinners, he reckons himself the *chief of them*. We are in no danger of being guilty of excess in condemning our selves, provided we apply our selves at the same time to Christ as God's salvation. The wound that sin has made is not to be skinn'd over, but laid open and search'd to the bottom, which may be painful, and uneasy to us, but we must betake our selves to Christ for the healing virtue of his blood, which is the only safe way for us to find ease and comfort.

4. Did Christ come into the world to save the chief of sinners, we may infer from thence, that the gospel is so far from leading persons to despair, that it is the only remedy against it, as it affords relief to those that are under a sense of the guilt of sin, which lies as an insupportable burden on their consciences. It puts them, indeed, upon despairing of obtaining salvation any other way than by Christ's righteousness;

■ Phil. iii. 6.

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but it is a foundation of hope to those that trust in it. We do not pretend, that salvation is to be attained by any thing we can do, without the efficacious grace of God. We freely own, that salvation is not in our own power; but we are encouraged to apply our selves to Christ for it, and to hope in the mercy of God through him, and in so doing we shall find that all our debts are cancell'd; and what Christ has done and suffer'd plac'd to our account, which will give us solid peace of conscience, and in coming to him, though *wearry and heavy laden*, we shall experience the accomplishment of that promise, that *he will give us rest*^a.

5. From the account we have, concerning the means by which Christ saves sinners, we are induced to set the highest value on his person, and to admire the condescending love he has express'd herein. Salvation is a work peculiar to God; therefore since the Character of a Saviour belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ, we are to adore him, as having those divine perfections that are eminently glorified in this great work, and to conceive of every thing that he has done and suffer'd, as being valuable in proportion thereunto. In this respect God is said to have laid help on one that is mighty, as he is elsewhere stiled, *mighty to save*^b. The blood by which

^a Mat. xi. 28.

^b Isa. lxiii. 1.

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the church was redeemed is called the *blood of God*^k; and indeed, it is only such an one that could manage it with success, so that the work should not miscarry in his hand.

And when we thus consider him as a divine person, we may take occasion to admire his condescending love, which must, for the same reason, be reckoned infinite. That such an one should come into this miserable and lost world, and in our nature, take away the guilt of sin by bearing it, and heal his people, by being wounded for their transgressions, is so wonderful a display of grace, that we may truly conclude him to be, as described, *worthy of all acceptance*.

6. From what has been said concerning this as being a *true and faithful saying*, we may infer the stupidity and misery of those who believe not the report of the gospel, which is founded on the strongest evidence; as our Saviour says, *If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins*^l; i. e. if ye believe not that I am God-man, Mediator, designed and sent by the Father to expiate sin, and every way fitted to do it, you are in a lost state. It is a dangerous thing to be *sceptics* as to this matter, inasmuch as it is a doctrine of the highest importance, and to entertain any doubt thereof, is inconsistent

^k Acts xx. 28.

^l John viii. 24.

with that faith which accompanies salvation; and it is also to shut our eyes against the clearest evidence, which is a sad instance of judicial blindness, and renders the gospel, which is a display of the glory of God in the face of Christ, of no effect to them.

Moreover, when we consider the faithfulness of God, as signally glorified in sending Christ into the world to save sinners, and our Mediator, as faithful and true in fulfilling what he had engaged to do and suffer in order thereunto; we may conclude, that all the promises which are yet to be accomplished shall certainly be made good by him, from whence the heirs of salvation may have strong consolation, and a well-grounded hope, that the work of grace, which is begun in them, shall be carried on; that as there has hitherto been no failure in any part of the work that he has undertaken to manage, so he will certainly perform it, upon which account believers may encourage themselves to hope, that they shall persevere to the end, and that all the promises, which are yea and Amen in him, shall be fulfill'd, and that he will bring those in whom the work of salvation is begun, to the full possession of that blessedness which is now in reversion, whereof they have the earnest and first fruits in this life.

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This leads us to speak something more immediately relating to the occasion of my insisting on this subject; which was, as I observ'd before, the desire of your late reverend pastor, who could not forbear to mention the great support and comfort that it afforded him in his last sickness, which put an end to his work among you. I am very sensibly afflicted for, and sympathize with you in your present destitute condition. The great God, whose unalterable decree has fixed the bounds of life, as well as determined the measure of our usefulness therein, has made an awful breach upon you in the removal of him who has for *two and twenty* Years past, gone in and out before you. When I consider him as well qualified for the work which he was engaged in, and desirous to be extensively useful to the utmost of his ability in preaching, and pleading for the great doctrines of the gospel, I can't but think, that the loss of him affects many others, though indeed it falls with much more weight on you, to whom he, more especially, stood related in the bonds of the gospel, and I doubt not but there are many among you, who retain the impressions of his valuable labours, and earnest exhortations to believe in Christ, which renders his memory very dear to them.

It is not, I confess, very agreeable to my inclination, or usual custom, to enlarge on the
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the personal character of deceased friends in public discourses of this nature; and it is a standing rule that I would generally observe, to take no notice of any thing in them, except what concerns their experience of the communications of divine grace when on a death-bed; or the testimony that they themselves desire should be communicated of their steady adherence to the faith of the gospel: But I am oblig'd at present, to enter a little into the personal character of your deceased pastor, lest by a total silence I should give occasion to any to think, that my concealing those things that many have been apt to censure him for, were an argument that I apprehended there was something in his conversation that would not bear the light.

It is certain, that he was very remote from affecting to put on an hypocritical disguise, or appear to be what he really was not; and therefore all that knew him might very easily observe, that his conversation was attended with some excursions of wit and pleasantry, which rendered it agreeable to many, while others were apt to censure it, who are dispos'd to make men offenders for a word, and count that sinful in ministers which they themselves reckon no crime in others. Certainly some allowance is to be made for natural temper, which is a very hard matter for any one to alter, till age, attended with some afflictive dispensations

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of providence, give a different turn to it; but if no allowance must be made for it, it will be difficult to find any person in this imperfect state that does not expose himself, some way or other, to reproach and calumny. I will not deny, but that an airy temper in some, as well as a fullen and morose disposition in others, which is the reverse thereof, exposes persons to some temptations, and may be accompanied with those sinful infirmities which they can't wholly exculpate themselves from on the one hand, nor avoid on the other; and the greatest difficulty they have to conflict with in this case is, the danger they are in of persons taking offence at them, which all are to endeavour, as far as it is possible, to fence against, and not give just occasion for it, especially they who are in publick stations of life.

This, I think, is the most that can be said, as an alloy to his character; and it is well, if they who with too great severity condemn him for it, are not guilty of those infirmities that are equally culpable: However, I must do him the justice, to mention one thing that will in some measure alleviate the charge brought against the airiness of his temper, which I have often taken notice of, and, I believe, there are many who are ready to join with me herein, from what they have also observed in his conversation, viz. that when he gave himself the greatest liberty in indulging his natural temper, he

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conscientiously avoided the least appearance of making things sacred the subject of wit or drollery; and when any one took occasion from thence, to run into any vile excesses of that nature, he would express the utmost detestation of it, and reprove them with gravity and faithfulness, telling them; that if they imagined that what they observed in his discourse gave the least umbrage to such profaneness, or they thought that he could allow himself in any thing that favour'd of it, they were mistaken in their man.

I shall now proceed to consider some things that were valuable in his character, which they who duly attend to, will have more favourable thoughts of him as a Minister and a Christian. The first impressions that he had of the grace of God on his heart, were, as he has occasionally mentioned to some, under the ministry of that excellent, pious and judicious divine, Mr. *Richard Taylor*, about the age of *fourteen or fifteen*, by whose direction and advice he was put under the tuition of the reverend Mr. *Jollie*, near *Sheffield*, who used those methods that were necessary to restrain his pupils from immoral practices, as well as instruct them in those things for which they were committed to his care, and though he often reprov'd Mr. *Sladen* for the gaiety of his temper, and complained of it to his worthy friend but now mentioned; yet nei-

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ther of them could see just reason to charge him with any immoralities arising from it, and therefore were disposed to pass it by, imputing it to his natural constitution, especially, considering it did not lead him to any thing that might stain his character as a christian.

When, at the age of *four and twenty*, he was called to the pastoral office in this church, at that time, and ever since, they had the utmost satisfaction, notwithstanding the censorious temper of some who did not know him so well, that he was not only a sincere christian, but a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth, and earnestly desirous to do good to the souls of those under his care. He fed them with sound doctrine, the great design whereof was to advance the grace of God, the person and offices of the Mediator, and to promote practical godliness, as built on that foundation; and he discovered herein, that his heart was in the work. His discourses were not only adapted to inform the judgment, but raise the affections of his audience.

I have been told, though you are the best judges thereof, that he was for some months past, more than ordinarily pathetic, both in lamenting the declining state of religion, and in pressing his people to adhere stedfastly to the doctrines of the gospel, in a day when many turn aside from
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them; making a solemn appeal to them, as he did in one of the last discourses he delivered, that he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God; that he had coveted no man's silver, nor gold, nor apparel; nor seeking theirs but them; affectionately warning them against impenitency and unbelief, as they would not have him appear as a swift witness against them, at the great day. ^{Now} Whether he thought, at the same time, that his ministry was almost at an end, we know not, but it is certain, that some who heard him could not but think, that he preached like one who was taking his farewell of them and of the world; this was his method of preaching, especially of late.

As to his conduct and behaviour in his publick ministry, occasionally exercised elsewhere, as well as in his private conversation, he was remarkable for his zeal in opposing the growing errors of the day; and if he gave occasion to any to think it was not sufficiently temper'd with charity, he was ready on all occasions to let them know, that he could distinguish between charity for doctrines subversive of the gospel, and that which is to be extended to the persons of all men: It was a zeal for truth, in opposition to those that endeavour to sap the very foundation of our faith and hope; and he has sometimes expressed an earnest desire, that God would enable him

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him to give a testimony thereunto with his dying breath, and this it pleased God to favour him with; which leads us to consider the last scene of his life.

It was but a few days before his sickness, at which time his health seem'd not to be in the least impaired, that he intimated in conversation with a friend, that he neither expected nor desired to continue long in this world, while lamenting the degeneracy of the present age; and when he was cast upon his dying bed, his reply to one that asked him, whether he had any expectation that he should be restored to health, was, that though he knew not the secret purpose of God with relation thereunto, yet if it was referred to his own choice, he would rather desire to leave the world: And after this, when he had the sentence of death within himself, and was strongly persuaded, that he should not live above two or three hours, (tho' in this he was mistaken) he called his Family, and several of his friends together, and gave a solemn testimony to the doctrine of justification by Christ's imputed righteousness, as that which was the foundation of his hope and comfort in death, advised them to continue stedfast in that doctrine, and to seek salvation only by Christ, who came into the world to save sinners, as they valued the welfare of their immortal Souls, and that this was that which he found

found a comfortable doctrine in a dying hour.

Thus God has been pleased, not only to give you, as a church of Christ, a pastor that has instructed you in those doctrines which are of the highest importance, from the pulpit, but he has also been pleas'd to use another method to establish you therein, by giving you to see the comfortable fruits and effects of a steady adherence thereunto, and a practical improvement thereof, as it affords the greatest composure of spirit in the immediate view of death, which, though formidable in it self, is rendered desirable to a believer, when God is pleased, by the inward testimony of his spirit, to give him a blessed hope, and foretaste of that glory which it will bring him to the fruition of.

May you, in God's good time, be provided with another to succeed in the pastoral office; who shall continue to feed you with wholesome doctrine, agreeable to the mind of Christ, and indeed no doctrine is so, but what has a tendency to advance his glory, as set forth in the gospel.

And as you desire and hope for this blessing, I would recommend to you the daily exercise of faith and prayer to the great shepherd of the sheep, that he would direct your way, and point out to you the man whom he has qualified for, and designed to employ in this important Service; that he
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may appear to be a pastor of his own choosing, who may feed you according to the integrity of his heart, and guide you by the skilfulness of hands, that you may be built up in your holy faith; and, though the providence of God has at present brought a dark cloud over you, he would give you ground to hope, that light shall shine out of darkness, and you be enabled, not only to fill up the relation you stand in to one another with those duties which it calls for; but may daily experience, that you have fellowship with Jesus Christ in all his ordinances, and rejoice in that salvation which is in him, who is over all God blessed for evermore. Amen.

May you, in God's good time, be pleased, by the inward witness of his Spirit, to give him a tried hope, and taste of that glory which it will bring him to the fruition of.



And as you desire and hope for this blessing, I would recommend to you the daily reading of the Gospel, as set forth in the Gospel.

And as you desire and hope for this blessing, I would recommend to you the daily reading of the Gospel, as set forth in the Gospel.

